

# FOCUS

A PUBLICATION OF THE

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May 2018

## 2017 Same-Sex Marriage

### Background

Same-sex marriage in Missouri has a complicated history. In the wake of Massachusetts' legalizing same-sex marriage in 2004, Missouri voters passed an amendment to the state constitution defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman, thereby banning same-sex marriages. This ban remained in effect for the entirety of the state for approximately a decade before a St. Louis circuit court judge struck down the ban for St. Louis City and St. Louis County on November 5, 2014 (*State of Missouri v. Florida*). Shortly thereafter, a federal district judge ruled similarly for Kansas City on November 7, 2014 (*Lawson v. Kelly*). St. Louis City, St. Louis County, and Jackson County immediately began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. One month later, a Jackson County circuit judge ruled that Missouri must recognize same-sex marriages from other states (*Barrier v. Vasterling*).

On June 26, 2015 in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the United States Supreme Court ruled that same-sex

couples had a right to marry, and Missouri began recording these marriages. Initially, however, not all counties had the ability to distinguish same-sex marriages from male-female marriages because those county-level reporting systems could only report "Bride" and "Groom" until they were updated for 2016. Therefore, the data for 2015 is incomplete; 2016 is the first full year for which complete data are available.

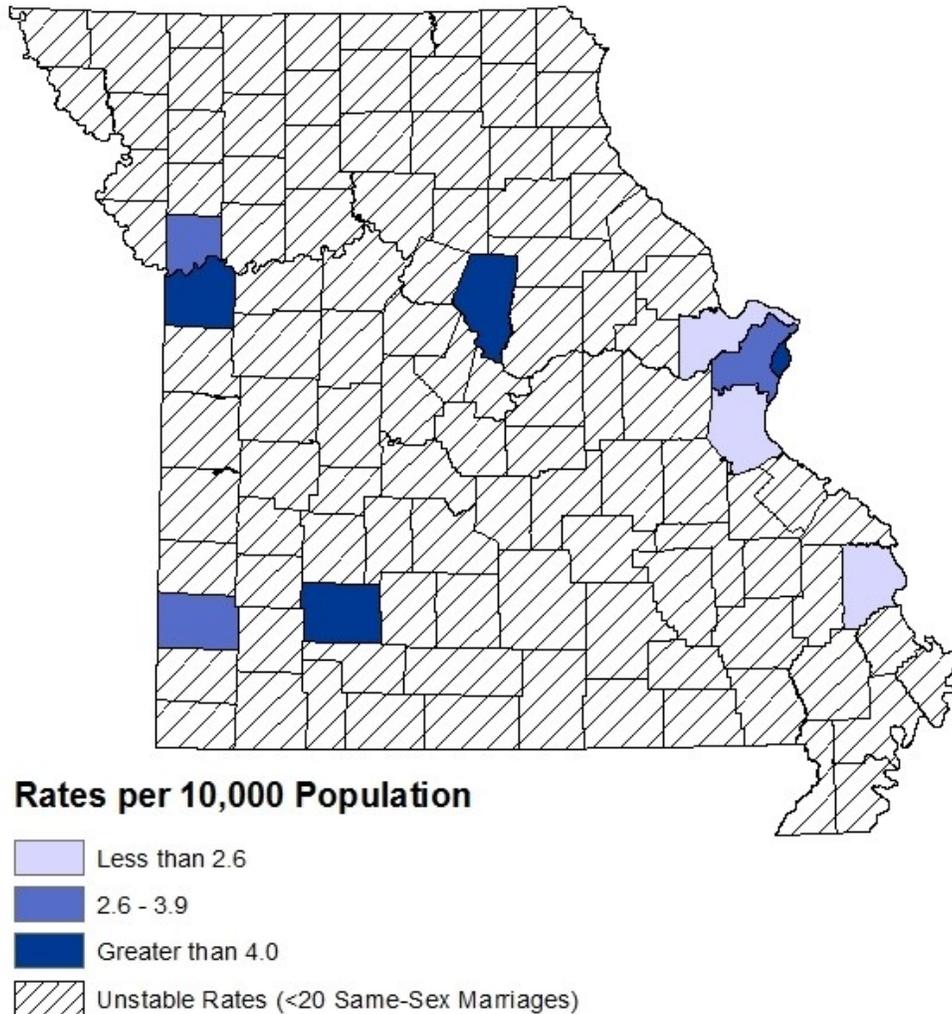
In 2016, there were a total of 1,577 same-sex marriages in Missouri; 974 of those marriages involved female-female partners and 603 involved male-male partners. This is similar to what was seen in the 2015 data, with 471 female-female couples and 255 male-male couples. Partners in female-female marriages tended to be younger than their male counterparts in 2016, with a significant difference of five years in average age (See Table 1). They were also less likely to be marrying for the first time compared to the male-male partners (76 percent versus 83 percent).

**Table 1. Missouri Recorded Average and Median Age at Marriage by Gender and Year: 2015-2016**

	2015		2016	
	Average	Median	Average	Median
Female-Female	40.3	39.1	36.3	34.2
Male-Male	41.9	42.2	41.1	40.6
Same-Sex Total	40.9	39.9	38.1	36.2
Male-Female	33.5	30.3	33.4	30.1

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## Missouri Recorded Same-Sex Marriage Rates by County: 2016



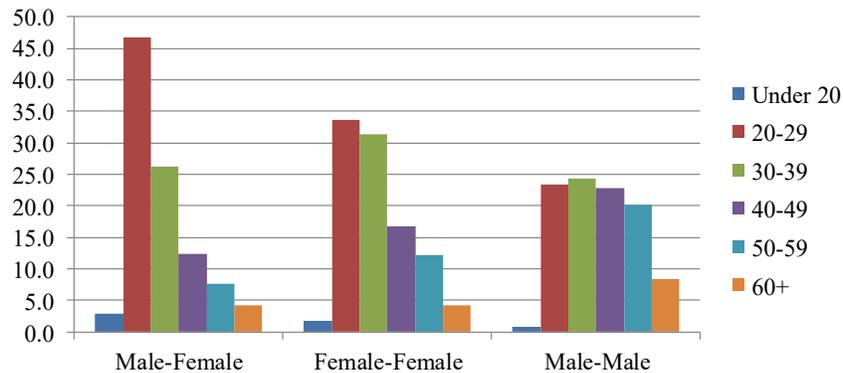
### *Geography*

A distinct pattern in the geographic distribution of same-sex marriages across the state has emerged in the early data. In 2016, only 10 counties had at least 20 same-sex marriages, and those counties had a combined rate of 3.6 marriages per 10,000 population. The rest of the state had a combined rate of 1.3 marriages per 10,000 population, and the state had a total rate of 2.6 same-sex marriages per 10,000 population. The county with the highest rate of same-sex marriage was St. Louis City at 7.5 marriages per 10,000 population. This rate is far smaller than the male-female marriage rate of 92.3 marriages per 10,000 population in St. Louis City. In comparison, the statewide male-female marriage rate is 69 per 10,000 population. In general the highest rates of

same-sex marriage are in the counties surrounding St. Louis, Kansas City, Springfield, and Columbia.

### *Other Characteristics*

In 2015 the average age at marriage for same-sex partners was 40.9 years compared to 33.5 years for male-female partners. By 2016, the average age for same-sex partners had dropped to 38.1 years while the average age for male-female partners remained steady at 33.4 years. These ages appear to be converging even more so far in 2017, although these data are not complete. Not only are partners in same-sex marriage older on average, but the distribution of ages differs as well. In 2016, for example, 20.2 percent of partners in male-male marriages fall in the 50-59 age range compared to just 7.6 percent of

**Graph 1: Percent of Missouri Recorded Marriages by Gender and Age: 2016**

partners in male-female marriages (See Graph 1). One explanation for the older age of partners in same-sex marriages in 2015 could be that couples who were in long-term relationships for many years prior to the legalization of same-sex marriage were among the first to be ready for marriage and therefore constituted a larger portion of the early marriages. The rapid convergence of the average age of same-sex partners with the average age of male-female partners would seem to support this.

Another early data highlight is the difference in previous marital status between same-sex marriages and male-female marriages. Partners in same-sex marriages are more likely to be single (never previously married) at time of marriage and less likely to be divorced or widowed compared to partners in male-female marriages. In 2016, 78 percent of same-sex partners were single (never married), whereas 66 percent of male-female partners

could say the same (See Table 2). These patterns are even stronger when looking at specific ages. For example, for persons aged 50-59, only 11.4 percent of male-female marriage partners were single or never married before compared with 68 percent single for partners in the same age group in same-sex marriages. These differences could again be due to the recency of the legalization of same-sex marriage; these partners did not have the option to be married to their same-sex partners, so unless they were previously a partner in an opposite-sex marriage they would be single by default.

The Bureau of Vital Statistics will continue to track same-sex marriage data to see the extent to which the differing characteristics for the two types of marriage converge over time. Data to track those patterns are available in the annual *Missouri Vital Statistics*, beginning with the 2016 edition.

**Table 2. Partners in Missouri Recorded Marriages by Age by Gender and Previous Marital Status: 2016**

	Male-Female			Female-Female			Male-Male		
	<i>Single*</i>	<i>Previously Married</i>	<i>Total**</i>	<i>Single*</i>	<i>Previously Married</i>	<i>Total**</i>	<i>Single*</i>	<i>Previously Married</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Under 20</b>	2309	4	2323	35	0	35	9	0	9
<b>20-29</b>	34444	2786	37280	597	57	655	272	11	283
<b>30-39</b>	12773	8171	21005	455	155	612	261	33	294
<b>40-49</b>	2212	7674	9928	192	135	327	222	52	274
<b>50-59</b>	685	5360	6069	145	91	236	183	61	244
<b>60+</b>	144	3168	3325	47	36	83	50	52	102
<b>Total</b>	<b>52567</b>	<b>27163</b>	<b>79930</b>	<b>1471</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>1948</b>	<b>997</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>1206</b>
<b>Percent</b>	<b>65.8</b>	<b>34.0</b>		<b>75.5</b>	<b>24.3</b>		<b>82.7</b>	<b>17.3</b>	

\*Never previously married

\*\*Totals include partners with an unknown previous marital status